



From the Editors

From the Editors: “Catalysing & Crystallizing” and “Conversations & Controversies”: Facilitating Debate in *Organization Theory*

Organization Theory
Volume 7: 1–7
© The Author(s) 2026
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/26317877261466261
journals.sagepub.com/home/ott



Markus A. Höllerer^{1,2,3} , Sigrid Quack⁴
and Rick Delbridge⁵

Abstract

Since its inception in 2020, *Organization Theory* has sought to provide an open and inclusive space for theorizing – a space that explicitly embraces diversity and paradigmatic plurality. In this editorial essay, we introduce a new section of the journal, “Catalyzing & Crystallizing,” and outline how it complements the existing “Conversations & Controversies” format. While “Conversations & Controversies” is designed to capture and foster debates around important topics within organization and management studies, “Catalyzing & Crystallizing” seeks to stimulate engagement with emerging topics and conceptual ideas originating at the margins of, or even beyond, our traditional domain of scholarly inquiry. Together the two sections strengthen the journal’s commitment to theoretical plurality, to intellectual openness, and to novel and innovative forms of organizational theorizing.

Keywords

dialogue, conversation, controversy, theorizing, special themed section, editorial

¹UNSW Business School, Sydney, NSW, Australia

²Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

³IAE Business School, Universidad Austral, Buenos Aires, Argentina

⁴University Duisburg-Essen, Germany

⁵Cardiff University, United Kingdom

Corresponding author:

Markus A. Höllerer, UNSW Business School, Sydney, NSW 2052, Australia.

Email: markus.hoellerer@unsw.edu.au



Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the Sage and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

Introduction

Organization Theory is a multidisciplinary journal, firmly rooted in the social sciences, inspired by diversity and paradigmatic plurality and open to commentary and debate (Cornelissen & Höllerer, 2020). Since its inception in 2020, the journal has featured three distinct sections: one for *theory articles* (which make up the bulk of what we are publishing), another for formative *review articles*, and a third one—called “Conversations & Controversies”—for essays in the form of a curated debate. The latter has been our attempt to capture important conversations happening within our domain of scholarly inquiry.

Since its launch, the journal has sought not only to publish theoretical contributions but also, on a more abstract level, to create an intellectual space in which different forms of theorizing can flourish. As we argued in earlier editorials, organization theory benefits from the coexistence of different styles and forms of theorizing (Cornelissen & Höllerer, 2020; Cornelissen et al., 2021). And the development of theory depends on both the sustained deep engagement with ongoing conversations in the field, on the one hand, and openness towards new questions, novel concepts and innovative ways of thinking and knowledge creation, on the other. Some advances emerge through commentary, dialogue and debate among scholars who hold different but complementary perspectives; others arise when new topics or intellectual perspectives enter the field and challenge existing assumptions or suggest new directions for scholarly inquiry.

Against this backdrop, we are now introducing a fourth section—called “Catalyzing & Crystallizing.” While both C&C sections are intended to stimulate theoretical development, they do so in different ways. “Conversations & Controversies” seeks to deepen and enrich ongoing conversations within our scholarly community of organization and management studies. “Catalyzing & Crystallizing” seeks to bring emerging or so far peripheral topics, novel ideas and concepts, promising avenues

of theorizing and voices from outside our domain to the attention of that community. One is concerned primarily with advancing existing theoretical dialogue; the other, with stimulating theoretical exploration and agenda setting. Importantly, for this new endeavour (“Catalyzing & Crystallizing”), we will work with guest editors, who will package a set of papers in a special themed section alongside a short introductory essay. In this essay, we explain the rationale behind the two C&C sections and how they complement one another within the broader mission of *Organization Theory*.

The Two C&C Sections in *Organization Theory*

Although they share a common commitment to advancing theoretical knowledge, the two C&C sections differ in their primary purpose, orientation, format and intended outcomes. Table 1 provides an overview that summarizes their distinctive roles within the journal’s portfolio.

This distinction, however, should not be interpreted as rigid separation. Conversations may lead to new theoretical directions, just as emerging themes may eventually become subjects of debate and controversy. Yet, the two formats differ in their primary emphasis. Whereas “Conversations & Controversies” focuses on issues that are already salient within our domain of scholarly inquiry, “Catalyzing & Crystallizing” seeks to identify and nurture ideas that may shape future conversations. Together they represent complementary pathways through which organizational theorizing can evolve and renew itself.

“Conversations & Controversies”

Essays in this section of *Organization Theory* feature commentary and debate on important theoretical topics in the field. Sets of authors may engage in a conversation about a topic in a complementary manner, for example, by highlighting alternative but compatible viewpoints on entrepreneurial imagination (Chiles et al.,

Table 1. Distinctive Roles of the Two C&C Sections in *Organization Theory*.

Role	“Conversations & Controversies”	“Catalyzing & Crystallizing”
Primary purpose	Capture, foster, advance, deepen and enrich ongoing theoretical conversations	Introduce and develop emerging topics, novel ideas and concepts and promising avenues of theorizing
Main orientation	Dialogue and debate	Exploration and agenda setting
Focus	Topics and theoretical approaches already attracting attention within our domain of scholarly inquiry	Topics, theoretical approaches and conceptual voices at the boundaries of, or beyond, our domain of scholarly inquiry
Typical format	Exchange among authors (usually two to three papers)	Special themed section (usually three to five papers)
Initiation	On a rolling basis following a suggestion by the editorial team or upon an informal proposal by potential authors to the co-editors-in-chief	Annually published call for proposals
Editorial model	Curated by co-editors-in-chief and/or associate editors together with the authors; no editorial	Edited by guest editors together with co-editors-in-chief; short introductory editorial
Intended outcome	Clarification and theoretical refinement of ongoing conversations	Stimulation of new conversations and future research agenda

2021; Grimes & Vogus, 2021; Sarasvathy, 2021) or ways of researching a subject such as democratizing and society (Adler, 2022; Battilana et al., 2022). In other instances, the communication between the two (or more) sides may take the form of a debate around competing viewpoints (i.e., controversy), such as, for example, how to decide as a scholarly community on key concepts for organizational research (Abend, 2024; Prasad, 2024; Suddaby, 2024) or how far to meaningfully expand the boundaries of a given theoretical construct (Hawbaker & Hallett, 2025; Nigam et al., 2025; Robinson & Atanasova, 2025), but similarly with the constructive aim of fostering new or revised ways of thinking about and researching organizations.

The section reflects our view of theorizing as a collective and ongoing endeavour: Theoretical progress rarely occurs through isolated contributions. Rather, it regularly emerges through exchanges among scholars who challenge assumptions, refine concepts, identify points of disagreement and occasionally discover unexpected common ground. Productive

conversations can help reveal conceptual blind spots or weaknesses, clarify theoretical positions, explore alternatives and, with all that, stimulate new avenues of inquiry. By providing a dedicated forum for such exchanges, the “Conversations & Controversies” section contributes to the development of organization theory as a vibrant and pluralistic discipline.

In this sense, the section embodies one of the core commitments of *Organization Theory*: the belief that theoretical advancement is strengthened by intellectual openness and engagement across different perspectives (Cornelissen & Höllerer, 2020). Given the diversity of paradigms, approaches, assumptions and traditions that characterize contemporary organization and management studies, opportunities for constructive dialogue are of particular importance. The section therefore seeks not merely to showcase disagreement but also to foster productive engagement that advances our collective understanding of organizational phenomena and social mechanisms.

The initiative for the development of a “Conversations & Controversies” contribution

may come from the editors-in-chief, the journal's editorial team, the journal's editorial review board or an informal proposal from potential authors to the editors. On receiving such a proposal, the editors-in-chief, together with other members of the editorial team, if required, will evaluate the proposal and, subject to initial approval of the potential of the topic, will ask for a more formal proposal which describes the relevance, scope and contribution of the anticipated essay submissions, including the different positions of the respective authors on the issue or topic and the proposed outcome of the conversation or debate.

Proposals for this section are received on a rolling basis and can be formally submitted via the manuscript central system. When preparing a proposal, we advise authors to read previous examples of debates featured in the journal to get a good understanding of what is required. In particular, we are keen to ensure a diversity of authors and perspectives on any given topic.

“Catalyzing & Crystallizing”

The rationale for the new special themed section – called “Catalyzing & Crystallizing” – is rooted in the recognition that theoretical innovation often emerges at the margins of established conversations. New ideas, concepts, perspectives and ways of theorizing frequently arise through engagement with neighbouring disciplines, through encounters with novel empirical phenomena or through attempts to address unresolved conceptual problems. At times, such developments remain fragmented and dispersed across different communities and domains of scholarly inquiry. At other times, they are visible but have not yet found a coherent expression within organization and management studies. By bringing together a small set of contributions around a shared theme, “Catalyzing & Crystallizing” seeks to provide a platform where such developments can be articulated, consolidated, stabilized and advanced.

In creating the “Catalyzing & Crystallizing” feature, we are seeking to promote scholarly engagement with novel and innovative ways of organizational theorizing that are thought provoking, agenda setting and forward looking, thereby “crystallizing” nascent and emerging new ways of thinking about organization, organizing, the organized and organization–society relations. In this way, we envisage that the section will advance organization theory by consolidating and stabilizing these approaches into a recognizable agenda. Such agenda-setting explorations may emerge at the interstices with neighbouring disciplinary fields that might be able to provide us with a better understanding of empirical phenomena or unresolved conceptual problems. We also welcome proposals that are aimed at “catalysing” current understandings and ideas in ways that bring fresh perspectives to bear, stimulate intellectual movement or offer a new coherence from which novel explorations may proceed.

The metaphors used have particular relevance and meaning in our endeavour. To crystallize means to bring into focus ideas that are emerging but not yet fully articulated, to make visible patterns and theoretical possibilities that otherwise might remain dispersed. To catalyse, by contrast, is to stimulate movement and transformation in the first place, to encourage new connections, new questions and new intellectual trajectories. The ambition of the section is therefore both generative and consolidating: It seeks simultaneously to stimulate theoretical exploration and to fortify emerging developments. This ambition, we feel, resonates strongly with the journal's broader commitment to supporting multiple forms of theorizing. As argued elsewhere, theoretical contributions may emerge through conceptual development, critique, synthesis, problematization or the introduction of novel ways of seeing organizational phenomena (Cornelissen et al., 2021; Reinecke et al., 2024). The section is intended as a venue in which such forms of theorizing can be brought together around

themes that have the potential to shape future research agendas.

Recent global developments illustrate, we feel, why such a space is needed. New technologies, shifting geopolitical conditions, ecological crises, changing forms of work and organizing and ever-evolving relations between organizations and society continue to generate novel questions for organizational scholarship. Discussions about organizing sustainability (Delbridge et al., 2024), the implications of artificial intelligence (Cornelissen et al., 2024) and the dual imperative of digital sustainability (Höllerer et al., 2026) for organizational theorizing provide but three recent examples of how emerging developments can create both opportunities and challenges for theory development. To remain relevant and contribute knowledge and answers to such pressing and complex issues, organizational scholarship must be able to skilfully handle such emerging developments and therefore also be willing to engage with novel, unfamiliar ideas and perspectives.

For the “Catalyzing & Crystallizing” section, we will publish a dedicated call for proposals once a year, made available via the website of the European Group for Organizational Studies, the Group’s listserv, and the journal’s social media channels. Proposals for—and the resulting special themed sections—should, as mentioned, explicitly look beyond existing conventions and push beyond the boundaries of theoretical knowledge in our domain of scholarly inquiry. We particularly welcome proposals that engage with emerging topics, bridge disciplinary boundaries, introduce new conceptual vocabularies or identify promising directions for future research. A variety of forms of contribution will be welcomed, including conventional academic theory papers and provocative scholarly essays. The overall objective, as outlined, is not novelty for its own sake but theoretical innovation that can enrich and advance organizational scholarship. We envisage that special themed sections following the “Catalyzing & Crystallizing” format will

become a regular feature of the journal once or twice per calendar year.

What We Are Looking For

Organization Theory publishes work in all areas of organization theory and embraces different styles and genres of theorizing (Cornelissen et al., 2021). Given the pluralistic ethos of the journal, papers that are written on a subject can take a variety of forms and lengths. Whatever the format and style in which papers are written, the general hallmark of papers published in our journal is (a) a theoretical argument is coherently developed and laid out in a way that (b) significantly contributes to our theoretical understanding of organizations and management.

Meaningful new implications or insights for theory must be present in all work published in the journal regardless of whether such implications or insights are derived from the development of novel ideas into new theory, a critique of received theory or a conceptual synthesis of recent advances. Submissions therefore also should clearly signal and communicate the nature of their theoretical contribution in relation to the existing literature.

These expectations apply equally to both the C&C sections. Whether contributions engage in dialogue around existing debates or seek to catalyse new directions for theorizing, they have to advance theoretical understanding in a meaningful and compelling manner. As emphasized in earlier editorials, the journal remains committed to publishing theory that actually matters and that opens up possibilities for future scholarship (Reinecke et al., 2022).

Concluding Remarks

With the introduction of “Catalyzing & Crystallizing,” the journal now features two dedicated C&C sections that serve complementary purposes. “Conversations & Controversies” creates a space for dialogue and debate around important theoretical issues within our community. “Catalyzing & Crystallizing,” by contrast,

creates a space for identifying and developing emerging themes that may shape future conversations. One deepens and enriches ongoing debates; the other seeks to stimulate new intellectual agendas.

Together the two sections perfectly embody the journal's commitment to theoretical plurality, intellectual openness and innovative forms of organizational theorizing. They reflect our belief that the continued development of organization theory depends on both sustained engagement with existing conversations and openness to new ideas, perspectives and possibilities.

It is our hope that this extension of the journal's portfolio will enable *Organization Theory* to even better cater to the needs of our scholarly community, to further strengthen its role as a platform for innovative and impactful theorizing and to remain highly attractive to authors and readers interested in organization, organizing, the organized and organization–society relations.

ORCID iD

Markus A. Höllerer  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2509-2696>

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Abend, G. (2024). Democratizing social scientists' words and distinctions: Where and why moral reasons are decisive. *Organization Theory*, 5(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877241293480>
- Adler, P. S. (2022). Capitalism, socialism, and the climate crisis. *Organization Theory*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877221084713>
- Battilana, J., Yen, J., Ferreras, I., & Ramarajan, L. (2022). Democratizing work: Redistributing power in organizations for a democratic and sustainable future. *Organization Theory*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877221084714>
- Chiles, T. H., Crawford, B., & Elias, S. R. (2021). Mind, body, and soul: A spiritual perspective on the entrepreneurial imagination. *Organization Theory*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877211005786>
- Cornelissen, J., & Höllerer, M. A. (2020). An open and inclusive space for theorizing: Introducing organization theory. *Organization Theory*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2631787719887980>
- Cornelissen, J., Höllerer, M. A., & Seidl, D. (2021). What theory is and can be: Forms of theorizing in organizational scholarship. *Organization Theory*, 2(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877211020328>
- Cornelissen, J., Höllerer, M. A., Boxenbaum, E., Faraj, S., & Gehman, J. (2024). Large language models and the future of organization theory. *Organization Theory*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877241239056>
- Delbridge, R., Helfen, M., Pekarek, A., Schuessler, E., & Zietsma, C. (2024). Organizing sustainably: Introduction to the special issue. *Organization Studies*, 45(1), 7–29.
- Grimes, M. G., & Vogus, T. J. (2021). Inconceivable! Possibilistic thinking and the sociocognitive underpinnings of entrepreneurial responses to grand challenges. *Organization Theory*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877211005780>
- Hawbaker, A., & Hallett, T. (2025). Call it what you want, just not an institution. *Organization Theory*, 6(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877251401242>
- Höllerer, M. A., Shinkle, G. A., George, G., Mair, J., Pan, S. L., Tim, Y., & Collings, D. G. (2026). "Digital sustainability": Addressing managerial, organizational, and institutional challenges. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 40(2), 241–251.
- Nigam, A., Amis, J., & Logue, D. (2025). People as institutions or why Taylor Swift rules the world. *Organization Theory*, 6(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877251398547>
- Prasad, M. (2024). Disagreeing to agree: Problem-solving and knowledge production. *Organization Theory*, 5(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877241293470>
- Reinecke, J., Boxenbaum, E., & Gehman, J. (2022). Impactful theory: Pathways to mattering. *Organization Theory*, 3(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877221131061>

- Reinecke, J., Little, L. M., Simons, T., Bliese, P., Dencker, J., Roberson, Q., von Krogh, G., & Gruber, M. (2024). Advancing management theory through interdisciplinary research: Challenges and opportunities. *Academy of Management Journal*, 67(6), 1421–1427.
- Robinson, T. D., & Atanasova, A. (2025). The organizational ontology of person-institutions. *Organization Theory*, 6(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877251406604>
- Sarasvathy, S. D. (2021). Even-if: Sufficient, yet unnecessary conditions for worldmaking. *Organization Theory*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877211005785>
- Suddaby, R. (2024). What theory is, what theory was: Whence and whither theory. *Organization Theory*, 5(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877241293475>

Author Biographies

Markus A. Höllerer (markus.hoellerer@unsw.edu.au) is professor of organization and management at UNSW Sydney, Australia. He also holds affiliations at WU Vienna, Austria, and IAE Business School, Argentina. He is currently Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Organization Theory*.

Sigrid Quack (ot.quack@gmail.com) is senior professor of sociology at Universität Duisburg-Essen, Germany. She is Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Organization Theory*.

Rick Delbridge (delbridger@cardiff.ac.uk) is professor of organisational analysis at Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, Wales. He also has an affiliation with Harbin Institute of Technology, China. He is incoming Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Organization Theory*.